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FM AMEMBASSY HARARE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 9676
INFO RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY
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RUEHAR/AMEMBASSY ACCRA 0956
RUEHDS/AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA 1130
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 0390
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 HARARE 000263

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SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR C. COURVILLE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/02/2015

TAGS: [ASEC](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ZI](#)

SUBJECT: MUTAMBARA ELECTED PRO-SENATE FACTION LEADER,
CHARTS OWN COURSE

REF: A. REF A: HARARE 227

[1](#)B. REF B: HARARE 215

Classified By: Ambassador Christopher Dell for reasons 1.5 b/d

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) Arthur Mutambara was elected President of the Pro-Senate faction of the MDC during its Congress on February [1](#)25. In his speech accepting the post, Mutambara praised Morgan Tsvangirai as a Zimbabwean hero but chastised him for becoming a "little Mugabe." Speaking primarily to a domestic audience, Mutambara highlighted nationalist themes and said the MDC was the rightful heir to the liberation war tradition. Beyond Mutambara's fiery speech, however, the Congress left little to inspire the crowd of more than 3,000, who were angered at the lack of accommodation and delays in receiving their promised meals.

[1](#)2. (C) Immediately after the Congress, Mutambara began reaching out to civil society leaders, who have largely backed Tsvangirai's faction. Mutambara's acceptance speech contradicted many of the positions of the faction's leadership, especially his opposition to the Senate and his call for MDC reunification, and could herald a difficult relationship with Welshman Ncube and others as Mutambara seeks to put his stamp on the faction. End Summary.

Few Surprises in Election Results

[1](#)3. (SBU) As widely expected (ref B), South Africa-based intellectual Arthur Mutambara won the presidency of the Pro-Senate faction after Deputy Secretary General Gift Chimanihire stepped aside. In return, Chimanihire was

unanimously awarded the position of national chairman.
Secretary General Welshman Ncube, Vice President Gibson

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Sibanda, and Treasurer Fletcher Dulini-Ncube all unanimously retained their positions.

¶4. (C) The Congress marked the first time that women have been elected to top positions within the opposition party. Glen Norah MP Priscilla Misihairabwi-Mushonga garnered support from nine of the 12 provinces to become the faction's deputy secretary general. Former MDC Women's Assembly official Miriam Mushayi was elected to the new post of deputy treasurer, which was likely created to compensate for Dulini-Ncube's poor performance as treasurer.

Mutambara Gently Criticizes Tsvangirai, Embraces Nationalism

¶5. (U) In his acceptance speech (e-mailed to AF/S), an energetic Mutambara confronted the intra-party divide head on and pledged to work toward reunification. Mutambara said Tsvangirai "deserves a place of honor in the fight for

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democracy" but suggested the other faction's president had become a "little Mugabe." Terming himself the "Anti-Senate leader of the Pro-Senate faction," Mutambara admitted that like Tsvangirai he was against the Senate and even advocated pulling out of Parliament and all other election-based institutions. Unlike Tsvangirai, however, Mutambara said he would not have overturned the National Council's initial decision to contest the Senate elections and would have accepted majority rule.

¶6. (U) Seizing issues that that have thus far been viewed as

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ZANU-PF's province, Mutambara proceeded to herald nationalistic themes:

- On the liberation war legacy, Mutambara praised "the pre-1980 Robert Mugabe" but said that the MDC were "better defenders of the liberation war legacy than the current ZANU-PF party."
- On land reform, he said that returning to the pre-2000 status quo was not desirable and accused the U.K. and other Western governments of reneging on support for redistribution. Distinguishing himself from ZANU-PF, he called for the equitable and transparent distribution of land.
- On foreign policy, Mutambara said his principles were grounded in pan-Africanism) a statement likely designed to ingratiate himself with regional observers. Rhetorically asking Mugabe "why should you monopolize anti-imperialism," Mutambara "put our American and European friends on notice" that he too was opposed to unilateralism and violations of sovereignty.

¶7. (U) Mutambara blamed the economic crisis squarely on ZANU-PF misrule and called for a comprehensive economic recovery program. Advocating reengagement with the international community, Mutambara said "our problems are so protracted that we can not go it alone." At a press conference on February 26, he reportedly pledged that his faction would develop a blueprint to revive the economy within a 100 days.

¶8. (C) Curiously, Mutambara did not reference his student activism credentials or reach out to students who in the past month have started regaining their past militancy (ref A), including a demonstration on February 27 at the University of Zimbabwe at which seven students were detained. According to Fulbright scholar and Bulawayo-based lecturer Elinor Burkett,

this was despite a recommendation on the point to Mutambara from MP David Coltart, who while absent from the Congress has emerged as one of Mutambara's biggest backers.

Congress Otherwise Falls Flat

¶9. (C) Beyond Mutambara's speech, the Congress left little to inspire the crowd who filled the 3,000-seat Bulawayo Amphitheater to above capacity. Pro-Senate faction "supporters" were bussed to Bulawayo from across the country with the promise of accommodation and meals. Spirits quickly dampened, however, after participants weathered a heavy downpour the night before without shelter and many did not receive their meals until late morning. As an angry crowd began demanding lunch, Nkayi MP Abednico Bhebhe told poloff that the faction had raised only half of the money it had hoped for, thus necessitating cutbacks in some areas such as food. (N.B. And presumably the originally scheduled second day, which was cancelled.)

¶10. (SBU) Although invited, few civil society groups attended the Congress and those that did gave only lukewarm endorsements of the process. Zimbabwe National Students Union (ZINASU) spokesperson Mfundo Mlilo said the students were aggrieved by the MDC's split and wanted a renewed focus on overthrowing the regime, garnering thunderous applause from the audience. Suggesting that the students' allegiance was still up for grabs, Mlilo called on both MDC factions to form an education policy. NCA's Lovemore Madhuku, the only significant civil society figure to attend, said he would ally with all groups that endorsed a new constitution, but noted his differences with the faction over the Senate.

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(N.B. Madhuku is close to Mutambara and was reportedly best man at his wedding.)

Mutambara Hits the Ground Running

¶11. (C) Immediately after the Congress, Mutambara began reaching out to civil society leaders in an attempt to build a personal following. Post understands that he has met with Crisis Coalition as well as other Bulawayo and Harare-based groups. To date, Mutambara has yet to meet with Tsvangirai, but we understand that Mutambara has made contact with the Pro-Boycott faction at a lower level.

¶12. (C) In a meeting with a USAID local employee on February 28, Mutambara said he had placed conditions on his acceptance of the Pro-Senate faction's top position. Among other things, he demanded independence from the faction's executive, a serious commitment to reunification, and the right to bring in his own people. (N.B. Fearful of creating another "kitchen cabinet," the faction's response to this last condition is still evolving.) Likening Ncube to an obnoxious employee that nonetheless delivered results, Mutambara said that Tsvangirai had failed to properly manage the independent-minded secretary general.

Muted Pro-Boycott Reaction

¶13. (C) The response to Mutambara's election by the Pro-Boycott faction has been muted thus far. Tsvangirai rallies planned for February 26 were cancelled due to the burial of Gilbert Shoko, the MDC MP for Budiriro, who died on February 23. Spokesperson Nelson Chamisa has publicly welcomed Mutambara's call for reunification and said that Tsvangirai's door was open. He insisted, however, that

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Tsvangirai was the only MDC president. National Council

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member Getrude Mthombeni told poloff on March 1 that the Pro-Boycott faction was taking a "wait-and-see" attitude toward Mutambara. Noting that there appeared to be factionalism within the faction, she said that Mutambara's speech was "going to get him in trouble" because it was more in tune with Tsvangirai's stance than Ncube's.

Comment

¶14. (C) Only days into Mutambara's presidency, cracks are already apparent in this shotgun wedding. His acceptance speech signaled some key differences with Ncube, the faction's hither-to powerhouse, and each are regarded as strong-minded. Most notably Mutambara's stance on reunification and opposition to the Senate) the public justification for the split) directly conflict with positions taken by the other leaders of the faction. Furthermore, Mutambara's insistence on bringing in his own people) including some economic advisors currently close to Tsvangirai) has not been well received by the faction,

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which has repeatedly denounced Tsvangirai's "kitchen cabinet."

¶15. (C) At this early stage, Ncube and company need Mutambara more than he needs them. After a long search, Mutambara emerged as the only Shona politician with the proper credentials who was acceptable to the faction's leadership - and who would agree to take the spot (others, such as Tendai Biti, spurned their offer). Meanwhile, Mutambara's acceptance speech has already generated a buzz among Zimbabweans who still remember his aggressive

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opposition to the GOZ while in student politics. Signaling that he is in it for the long haul, Mutambara and his wife are reportedly planning to move into a family-owned house in one of Harare's low-density suburbs.
SCHULTZ